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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TBILISI 000808

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: FIRST MEETING OF INCIDENT PREVENTION
MECHANISM

REF: A. TBILISI 0674

[B](#). GENEVA 0183

[C](#). MOSCOW 1082

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment. The first meeting of the Joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (JIPRM) was held on April 23 on the South Ossetian administrative boundary line at Ergneti. The fact the meeting occurred was a minor victory itself, and the parties agreed to hold a subsequent meeting the first week of May. No actual incidents were discussed, however, and only marginal progress was made on procedural issues. The South Ossetian and Russian participants sought to undermine the OSCE's role in the process, suggesting that the EU and Russia should be co-chairs. Both the EUMM and the OSCE believe that the next meeting is unlikely to be useful unless the chairmanship issue is resolved beforehand. Although the fact of the meeting is indeed positive, the mechanism will only be useful it can be structured in a practical way, to enable the consideration of concrete concerns without the introduction of intractable political issues. Initial signals from the South Ossetians and Russians suggest the latter might be their intention. End summary and comment.

THE FORMAT

[1](#)2. (SBU) On April 24, EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) Chief of Mission Hansjoerg Haber offered his diplomatic colleagues a readout of the meeting (most of the following account is based on his comments). The parties involved included the EUMM, OSCE, Georgia, Russia, and South Ossetian de facto authorities, with several delegations sending fairly senior representatives (see paragraph 13 for a list of participants). The meeting started a few minutes after 1300 in a tent on the administrative boundary near Ergneti and lasted nearly four hours; much of the time was spent on interpretation. The day was cold, with temperatures hovering around the freezing point and bits of snow drifting into the venue. Haber and Deputy Head of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Center Pascal Heyman co-chaired the meeting. (The issue of the chairmanship came up several times, however, with the South Ossetians and Russians objecting to the OSCE's involvement.) The formal agenda focused on the logistics and format of the JIPRM itself and included eight items, although not all items were discussed: 1) Location; 2) Working language; 3) Meeting agendas; 4) Official minutes of the meetings; 5) Chairmanship; 6) Calendar of meetings; 7) Hotline; and 8) Joint visits. Afterwards the various parties made statements to journalists on the scene, who represented mostly Georgian outlets, but also included at least one Russian reporter.

THE DISCUSSION

[1](#)3. (C) The chairmanship issue came up the most often and

raised the most contention. Haber took the position that the JIPRM derived from the Geneva process, which is co-chaired by the EU, OSCE and UN, so the South Ossetia version of the Mechanism should be chaired by the two Geneva chairs that work in the area (i.e., EUMM and OSCE). South Ossetia's primary representative, Merab Chigoev, first objected to the EUMM's role as chair; Haber offered to work as a "facilitator" instead, which Chigoev seemed to accept. Chigoev then rejected the OSCE outright, arguing that the organization has no mandate to operate. He proposed that Russia and the EUMM should co-chair the meetings, and the Russian participants expressed their willingness to accept the nomination. A Russian representative even suggested that the Geneva talks themselves derived from, as he referred to it, the Sarkozy-Medvedev agreement, so the EU and Russia should therefore serve as chairs. Haber, OSCE's Pascal Heyman, and Georgia's Shota Utiashvili (Ministry of Internal Affairs) all pushed back, and the issue was left unresolved. In his briefing for diplomats, Haber characterized the South Ossetian and Russian maneuver as an obvious setup, designed to undermine the OSCE's position; in a later conversation, an OSCE monitor described it to PolOff the same way.

¶4. (SBU) On the question of location, the South Ossetians had originally indicated they would only accept meetings right on the administrative boundary line (where the April 23 meeting took place), but the physical difficulties of meeting in a tent apparently convinced them to be more flexible. All agreed to hold the next meeting south of the administrative boundary line, in Georgian-controlled territory, although the specific venue (likely to be some kind of a public building, such as a school) was not identified. The location of

TBILISI 00000808 002 OF 004

subsequent meetings was not determined.

¶5. (C) On the working language, Haber insisted the JIPRM follow the format of the Geneva talks and be conducted in English and Russian. The Russians suggested that Russian would be more practical, since most participants spoke Russian, but Haber insisted on English. Although the Russians portrayed their suggestion as a purely pragmatic one, Haber suggested to his diplomatic colleagues that over the course of the meeting it became clear that the Russians saw the use of Russian as more than simply a practical choice; they seemed to want to make the format of the meetings as close to that of the old Joint Control Commission (JCC) as possible. In a separate conversation, OSCE delegate Steve Young noted to PolOff that at least one of the Russian participants spoke no English. He also pointed out that conducting the meetings in Russian would give the Russian participants much greater control over the nuances of the discussion and any statements or documents that were produced.

¶6. (SBU) Haber told the diplomatic corps he had proposed a generic agenda, to be used in all meetings, consisting of four points: 1) Assessment of the situation; 2) Exchange of information on incidents; 3) Discussion of the freedom of movement; and 4) Other business. Parties could provide information before the meeting, to be able to discuss it at the meeting, or could provide the information at the meeting and then discuss it at the following session. On the discussion of incidents, parties would take turns raising individual occurrences, so that the parties themselves could determine their priorities for discussion. Haber did not receive a reaction to this proposal.

¶7. (C) Regarding the schedule of the JIPRM's meetings, the Russian participants proposed biweekly sessions (which, as Haber pointed out to his diplomatic colleagues, was not in accordance with the original Geneva proposal for weekly meetings, although he did not raise an objection). They said they would next be available between May 3 and May 7. Haber interpreted this to mean that the Russian side again wanted to send a relatively high-level delegation from Moscow. The

sides agreed to this timeframe. On the hotline, everyone agreed such a structure should function, but at this point the EUMM only has a phone number for Colonel Anatoliy Tarasov, Commander of the Russian Forces in Tskhinvali (who also participated in this meeting). The meeting did not take up the issue of joint visits, but the Russian side said it considered them important, which surprised Haber.

¶8. (SBU) At the conclusion of the meeting, Haber noted that the group had not reached much agreement. Major General Vyacheslav Proshkin, of the Russian Ministry of Defense (MOD), who is the Chief of the CIS Military Cooperation Department, however, portrayed it as a success, because the fact that the JIPRM met at all was important. He made a similar statement to the press. In his public statement, Haber also expressed some optimism, but injected a bit more caution into his tone than Proshkin.

ANALYSIS

¶9. (C) In summary, Haber told the assembled diplomats that an optimist would conclude that the fact that the meeting took place at all was positive; that optimist would likewise explain that all sides felt the need to take a tough initial position in order to position themselves for future compromises. He did not seem to be quite this optimistic, however (as other European counterparts reported to Embassy Moscow, ref C). He said that the chairmanship issue was a serious one, and that if it was not worked out before the next meeting, the next discussion would be chaotic, and the meeting would not be worth holding. He suggested that EU Special Representative Pierre Morel would have to get involved in the meantime to work something out. In a separate conversation, OSCE's Young agreed, saying that starting another meeting without consensus on the chairmanship would prevent the mechanism from accomplishing anything.

¶10. (C) Haber saw the South Ossetian and Russian proposal for a joint EU-Russia chairmanship as a clear attack on the OSCE; Young agreed with this assessment. Another OSCE monitor told PolOff that the meeting has had a very negative impact on the OSCE monitors' morale, which was already low; they interpreted the Russian position as a clear signal of their intention to shut the OSCE mission down. The monitor pointed out that one of the Russian delegates played a key role in the closing of the OSCE's former Border Monitoring Mission along Georgia's border with Russia; he wondered if his

TBILISI 00000808 003 OF 004

involvement was intended to send a signal that the OSCE mission was likewise on the chopping block.

¶11. (C) The OSCE monitor added that his colleagues felt that, during the meeting, Haber and the EUMM also slighted the OSCE mission, if only through petty, perhaps even unintentional snubs. He worried that such unspoken signals might be interpreted by the Russians as a tacit willingness by the EU eventually to sacrifice the OSCE's involvement. For example, EUMM staff did not share its planned agenda for the meeting with the OSCE until the morning of April 23, a couple of hours before the meeting. Upon arriving at the site, the OSCE representatives found that the road to the tent was blocked by an EUMM vehicle, so that they had to approach on foot, while the EUMM had parked right by the tent. The OSCE representatives found EU flags erected at the site, but had not been asked to bring an OSCE one; they had to scrounge a flag from an OSCE vehicle and hastily hoist it. Upon entering the meeting, the EUMM officials did not formally greet the OSCE representatives (who had arrived first), although they did greet the other parties. In his presentation to the diplomats, however, Haber made clear that he considered the role of the EUMM and OSCE as co-chairs to be non-negotiable.

COMMENT: NOT THE JCC!

¶12. (C) The OSCE monitor told PolOff he thought the South Ossetians and Russians are seeking to turn the JIPRM into a new JCC -- i.e., a forum for consideration of political issues, not practical incidents. He noted that the mechanism conceived in Geneva should consist of working-level counterparts who know the real situation on the ground and can work together pragmatically to resolve concrete concerns.

The high-level Russian delegation could signal a different intent, and if -- as Haber believes -- the Russians continue to send generals (who do not spend much time in South Ossetia and presumably are not that familiar with day-to-day issues), practical discussions will indeed be difficult to arrange. It could be, of course, that the Russians are very serious about the mechanism and only intend to signal their respect for the process. If Haber and Young are right, however, and a major Russian goal is to marginalize the OSCE, then a follow-on goal might be to establish a second venue for political discussions as a rival to Geneva, where the OSCE also has a seat. Not only would such a goal undermine the Geneva process, but it would undermine the still-urgent objective of reducing the likelihood of violence and its potential for escalation.

PARTICIPANTS

¶13. (U) The EUMM provided the following list of participants.

EUMM: Hansjoerg Haber, Head of Mission; Gilles Janvier, Deputy Head of Mission; Gerard Fischer, Head of Operations; Rosaria Puglisi, Political Advisor. Acting as interpreters: Rinas Bendzius, Liaison Officer at Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA); Per Enerud, Chief Reporting Officer.

OSCE: Pascal Heyman, Deputy Director of the Conflict Prevention Center; Gottfried Hanne, Deputy Head of Mission; Steve Young, Chief Military Officer; Laszlo Belagyi, Chief Security Officer.

Russian Federation: General Antonov, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Russian Ground Forces; Major General Vyacheslav Proshkin, Ministry of Defense (MOD), Chief of CIS Military Cooperation Department; Aleksey Dvinyanin, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chief of Division, Fourth Department on CIS Countries; QChief of Division, Fourth Department on CIS Countries; Colonel Ruslan Boyarski, MOD; Colonel Anatoliy Tarasov, Commander of the Russian Forces in Tskhinvali; Lieutenant Colonel Andrey Lyatichevsk, Assistant to Commander of the Military Base in Military-Civilian Cooperation, Tskhinvali.

Georgia: Shota Utiashvili, Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA), Head of the Information and Analytical Department; Vladimir Jugeli, MOIA, Head of the Shida Kartli Regional Main Division; Giorgi Lomidze, MOIA, Head of Administration of Shida Kartli Regional Main Division.

South Ossetia de facto authorities: Merab Ilyich Chigoev, deputy head of the de facto "plenipotentiary representative of the president of the republic of South Ossetia for post-conflict settlement issues"; Vitaly Georgievich Gassiev, de facto "first deputy minister of the interior"; Gennady Nikolaevich Yemelyanenko, de facto "deputy head of the border guards service"; Vadim Otarovich Syukayev, de facto "deputy chief of staff of the ministry of defense"; Guram

TBILISI 00000808 004 OF 004

Grigorievich Sobayev, advisor to the de facto "plenipotentiary representative of the president of the republic of South Ossetia for post-conflict settlement issues."

TEFFT